

# KSG students go into action

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Sixty Kennedy School Students spent last semester analyzing seventeen city departments for Somerville, Massachusetts through a KSG course.

Professor Linda Bilmes, former assistant secretary of management and budget at the U.S. Department of Commerce, teaches STM-411, Budgeting and Financial Management.

The class assisted Somerville with a new city-wide assessment called SomerStat. This project looks at the city's major services and their costs, and seeks to create performance measures for its departments.

Students who chose to participate rather than write a lengthy final paper were required to work in Somerville for a minimum of four hours per week over at least six weeks.

They also attended a workshop conducted by Somerville City budget officials. While Professor Bilmes admits she was somewhat "apprehensive" about how the students would be received, all reports show that their help was much appreciated and that city personnel were happy to have them.

Over the course of the four months many department managers were interviewed and the functions of Somerville translated to "activity-maps" that help in monitoring spending and efficiency.

SomerStat's mission is to reduce wasteful spending but the students were not asked for any recommendations concerning lay-off or budget cutbacks.

The project allowed students to apply their learning to a real-world problem. And it was very real-world; just ask Leif Dormsjo who, after spending the day with the Somerville fire headquarters, took a seat on an engine headed to put out a blaze.

The students recognized that their work was the beginning of what was to become a large and lengthy project. The "free consulting" was highly valued by the city and the students were a critical piece to the project getting off the ground.

The program's operations director commented that "the department heads really enjoyed it."

Certainly the students did as well.

After all, how often can KSG students summarize a final project as "analyzing potholes, meeting with city officials, and eating with fire-fighters"?